

MICK PAULL AND THE ODIHAM FIRE SHOW

By Simon Rowley

As reported in the last Fire Cover, Mick Paull the well-known founder of the Odiham Fire Show and officer in charge of the retained Odiham fire station in Hampshire passed away in January after a tragic work-related accident.

Mick's massive funeral was a well-deserved and fitting tribute and demonstrated the affection held for him by the large village and also by the numerous members of the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and fire preservationists from across the country who came to pay their respects.

The funeral cortege was led by a pair of Hampshire Police motor-cycle outriders ahead of Watch Manager Mick's predecessor as Odiham's Officer in Charge, Sub Officer Ted Pither, himself an active fire service preservationist, who walked ahead of Mick's Austin fire appliance that carried his coffin.



Led by a Hampshire Police motor-cycle outrider, the funeral cortege make its way towards Odiham High Street. All photos: Simon Rowley



Mick Paull's ex-Berkshire & Reading Austin K2 carried his coffin and was flanked by members of the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. The '10', created from flowers, is Odiham's station number

In fact, the Paull and Pither families often travelled in convoy to rallies and had been friends and colleagues for nearly half-a-century.

Odiham High Street was lined with residents as the cortege passed by with rows of Mick's family, friends and colleagues walking behind followed at the rear by Odiham's Volvo adorned with a wreath spelling "Mick".

Outside All Saints Church lines of serving fire and rescue service members and preservationists, some wearing fire kit from the past 50 years, stood to attention as the pallbearers walked slowly past.

The church was packed to overflowing and after the service the solemn procession made its way along Odiham High Street before disbanding and then reformed at the crematorium.

The cortege had started from Odiham Fire Station where Mick (The Legend) had joined the Hampshire Fire Service in the early 1970s and served for 44 years, nearly half-of-which as officer-in-charge.

In a special on-line book of condolence, it stated: "His old-fashioned values are something we can all admire and learn from."



Odiham's Volvo WR1 was adorned with wreaths spelling 'Mick' and had its light-bar covered up

Although Mick was a well-known character in the fire and rescue service, it was as the founder and main organiser of the renowned Odiham Fire Show that brought him fame and respect throughout the country.

The show was the result of highly successful open days at the fire station and, formed in 1992, it was not long before it was regarded as the leading event of its type in the south if not the whole country.

With only a couple of years missed through unforeseen circumstances, the Odiham Fire Show had become a must in their diaries for numerous preservationists and enthusiasts and the events attracted hordes of visitors and raised ten-of-thousands of pounds for the Firefighters' Charity, the air ambulance and local charities.

Mick had had a deep interest in fire service historical matters from an early age and in the 1982 Blandford Fire Engine Rally he entered a pair of former NFS Austin appliances.

Austin K2 auxiliary towing vehicle (ATV) GLT 396 dated from 1942 and was fully restored in National Fire Service grey and towed a Sigmund trailer-pump. As its history was uncertain, it carried the NFS markings for Odiham fire station.

Mick's other appliance at Blandford was a 1942 Austin K2 major pump (GLE 973) that he had owned since it was disposed of by Adwest Engineering of Woodley Aerodrome in Reading in 1978.

This had started off as a heavy unit with Fire Force 15 in Berkshire and then passed to the Berkshire and Reading Fire Service in 1948. It was rebuilt by the brigade, equipped with a Dennis Number 2 pump and 30ft Ajax ladder, and stationed at Hungerford where it was christened 'John O' Gaunt'.

When Mick acquired the appliance, it was 'rough' but he carried out a chassis-up restoration to its Hungerford condition so it was highly appropriate that it was this appliance that carried him on his final journey.

As well as at the Odiham rally, the writer has photographs of this appliance at rallies at Basingstoke, Bradford-on-Avon and Delta-Fire in 1987, Parham in West Sussex in 1988 and Netley in 1992 so it was very well travelled.

An arrival into the Paull fire engine collection was a Fordson 7V heavy unit (GJJ 12) with a Tangye 900 gpm pump. New in 1941, its NFS service was unknown but it carried markings for the Aldershot area. It had many owners in Surrey, Berkshire and Essex before coming to Mick in 1992.

By the 1997 Odiham Fire Show, Mick's collection of fire memorabilia had grown to include a 1904 Merryweather "Rochester" hosecart used by the Hellingly Mental Hospital near Hailsham. He obtained it in a poor condition in 1993 and restored it so it could appear in the TV adaptation of "Rebecca".

Also from Hellingly was a 1921 Merryweather street escape and his non-motorised collection included a John Morris built hosereel carrier and a Hughs of Birmingham built hose cart, both dating from 1920, the latter having been used by a woollen mill in Yorkshire.

The rally programme credited Mick as the owner of a 1938 Dennis TA 500 gpm trailer pump from Adwest Engineering, a 1941 Sigmund two-man manual pump, a 1942 Scammell ultra-lightweight trailer pump, a 1940 trade bike used by air raid wardens and a 1956 Coventry Climax FWP trailer pump built for the AFS and latterly used by Portals Paper Mill at Overton.

All these varied items formed a unique display outside the Odiham Fire Show control point that was always manned by Mick's family and friends.

By the time of the 1997 Odiham Fire Show, Mick had spent well over 1,500 man-hours in carrying out a major restoration project to 1939 Leyland FK9 Cub (FLJ 356) pump escape built with a limousine body for the Bournemouth Fire Brigade.

Powered by a Leyland 29.4hp straight six Z-type petrol engine with dual ignition, the appliance was equipped with a Gwynne 700 gpm pump and was fitted with a Merryweather escape that was originally owned by the Romsey Fire Brigade.

Serving at Bournemouth Central, West Hill and Pokesdown fire stations, it came out of service in 1964 and passed through the hands of several preservationists before coming to Mick in 1995.

As was the case with all Mick's appliances, the Leyland was certainly a show-stopper but it was certainly equalled by a pair of wartime appliances that came to Mick, a Bedford MSZ and an Albion.

The Bedford (APR 679) has an interesting history. It was new in 1940 to the Wareham UDC in Dorset, was built in Braidwood-style by Superline Bodies of Sugar Lane, London SE and powered by a Bedford 28hp straight six petrol engine.

Initially it was equipped with a Pulsometer 1,000 gpm pump and after NFS service it went into the fleet operated by the Dorset Fire Brigade who replaced the pump with a Dennis No 2. Subsequently this has been replaced again by a 500 gpm automatic priming Pulsometer pump that came off a trailer pump.

Once its Wareham service was over, Dorset loaned the Bedford to the National Trust on Brownsea Island between 1964 and 1967 and then it was sold off to a group of students and later came to an Austin 7 enthusiast at Bursledon in Southampton.

Colin Mockett of West End owned it for ten years before it passed to Mick in 1998 and he carried out his usual painstaking restoration.

Having completed the Bedford to his own high expectations, Mick turned his attention to a 1939 Albion / John Kerr (DVF 765) that came to him in 2002. This was new to the Diss UDC in Norfolk and was equipped with a Drysdale 500 gpm pump.

After NFS service, it passed to Norfolk Fire Service in 1948 where it remained until the 1960s going into preservation in Essex before arriving at Firemark Cottage, Odiham.

As the restoration progressed, it was a regular attender at the Odiham Fire Show every year so that by 2006 it was in all its splendour complete with Bayley 35ft wooden extension ladder.

There is no doubt that Mick Paull's superb exhibits were admired by young and old and he was always very willing to take the time to explain the workings or discuss the merits of his appliances so long as he wasn't needed in the arena!

Mick's ardent enthusiasm, his dry sense of humour and his beguiling character will be remembered by so many people and, if it does take place in the future, the Odiham Fire Show will never be the same without the presence of The Legend.



"Three cheers for Mick and his family" at the 2009 Odiham Fire Show



With a 'flying bomb' in the background, Mick's Fordson 7V Heavy Unit, GJJ 12, is seen at an early Odiham Fire Show



Mick's first preserved fire appliance was an Austin K2 ATV, GLT 396, seen here towing a Dennis trailer pump at a Solent Fire Engine Rally



Restoration of Mick's Bournemouth Leyland Cub FK9, FLJ 356, was completed in time for the 1996 Odiham Fire Show



Mick carried out superb restorations on ex-Diss Albion / John Kerr pump DVF 365 and ex Wareham Bedford MSZ / Superline Bodies pump, APR 679



Mick keeps a watchful eye as flames engulf a wooden building at the 2011 Odiham Fire Show



Mick, the Officer in Charge at Hampshire's Odiham fire station, always made sure that the station's appliance was in pristine condition as can be seen in their Volvo FLH250 / Emergency One (UK) WrT



KING'S CROSS - 30 YEARS ON

"We were used to death but this was too much. The acrid smell, the thick smoke. The horror was evident right from the start." A policeman told us to clear off; "we are doctors, we can help!" "There was a fireman" he said, "by St Pancras steps. He has just been brought up and was in a bad way." "He was on the ground, lifeless, amidst a mass of cables and hose. Two other doctors were there, passers-by, like us, giving cardiac massage." That fireman was Station Officer Colin Townsley, in charge of the first pump to arrive. "Firefighters emerged from the thick smoke, staggering, confused and exhausted. Be careful you are treading on bodies. A fireman collapsed, we helped him into an ambulance, quickly. Oxygen mask on, tunic off, the heat poured off his beetroot flesh like steam from a boiling kettle. Burned certainly, pneumonitis possibly, but he would be all right. Others lay exhausted on the floor, faces blackened with soot, relieved to be out of the terrible heat."

This very graphic description was given by Dr. Martin Deahl in an interview for the Express and Star newspaper printed on 17 November 2017. On 18 November 1987 he was a medic undertaking psychiatric training at Maudsley Hospital, south London and he and his colleague, Paolo Domizi, found themselves the first doctors on scene. The first call received by London Fire Brigade to King's Cross London Transport Station, Piccadilly Line, Pancras Road, NW1, is timed at 1936 and is from British Transport Police. Three other calls were received at 19.49, one via Wembley Control and two via Stratford Control.

The PDA of four pumps, aerial, FCU, ACU is mobilised. The incident is on Euston's ground but they are attending an incident at University College Hospital, Gower Street. The PDA comprises: C27 Clerkenwell PL, A24 Soho PL, P, TL, Manchester Square P, North Area Forward Control Unit and North East Area Control Unit. The pump from Soho is mobilised via radio. An ADO is advised and he responds.

Soho's pump ladder arrives at 1942 and parks outside the St Pancras entrance in Pancras Road. Two firemen stay at street level, Stn O Townsley and three others go down stairs along the subway and onto the concourse. There is no evidence of fire and everything appears normal. The group move to the top of the Piccadilly Line escalator where they saw a fire about 7metres down escalator 4. One minute after Soho's arrival Clerkenwell and Manchester Square arrive, a minute on and Soho's pump and TL arrive. The FCU arrives at 1946, with the ACU arriving at 20.01.

Stn O Townsley orders his three crew: "get sets and a jet!" The public have now seen the fire and were panicking, beginning to run for exits.

Clerkenwell's PL had parked behind Soho's pump ladder. Five of the six crew dismount and make their way to the concourse. They note a slight smell of burning. Three of this group turn around to return to their appliance to rig in BA. The remaining firemen on the concourse meet at the head of the escalator on fire, seeing a small fire with passengers walking up unaffected escalators, somewhat bemused by the firemen's presence. One of the group of firemen goes down the affected escalator, passed the fire, to stop people coming up whilst Stn Officer Townsley has decided to 'make up'.

Manchester Square have parked in Crestfield Street. Four crew make their way to the underground booking hall and headed towards the head of escalator 4 from where one of the crew at that location notices them, he and three others are instructed by the Stn O from Manchester Sq to get some jets and BA. The two Stn Officers, from Soho and Manchester Sq confirm that jets are required. Stn O Townsley instructs a fireman to go back and 'make pumps 4, persons reported'. A hose line is being hauled down the stairs. C27's crew have donned BA between the escalator and ticket office barrier, but not started it as they await instruction.

As the fireman tasked with the 'make up' message walked towards the ticket barrier there was a sudden increase in temperature accompanied by a rapid build-up of smoke, within seconds the concourse was plunged into total darkness and conditions became unbearable. The BA team had no time

to start BA, running across the concourse in an attempt to distance themselves from the heat and smoke. They failed and were rapidly overtaken by smoke and heat, they could hear people screaming for help. As they ran they ushered numerous people into and along the subway to fresh air.

Soho's P and TL arrived in Euston Road, both crews told to wait. There was no sign of fire or smoke. Suddenly they heard shouting, screaming. A large volume of black smoke erupted from the Underground entrance and a large number of people rush out. The P and TL crew are ordered to rig in BA and effect rescues. Two BA emerge with a burned casualty, a jet is at work.

'Make Pumps 4' is passed at 1947. Wembley Control mobilise A23, Euston's pump ladder, with C26, Barbican's Damage Control Unit, and North Area FIU. Upon arrival four crew from Euston rig in BA and enter following a line of hose. Once at the fire front, the OIC of Euston's BA team withdraws them to get a second jet and make their way to the booking hall and attack the fire.

The ADO arrives at 1949, cannot locate an officer-in-charge and realises the situation is very serious. Heat and smoke are issuing from all street entrances to the Underground whilst two people with burns are lying on the pavement. The ADO ordered two firemen to assist the two casualties and at 1953 sends: 'make pumps eight, persons reported.' This is just seven minutes after the first pump had arrived!

Euston P by radio, A25 Westminster PL and P, Manchester Sq PL, J24 Walthamstow hose layer, are sent on, as are two more ADOs and a DO.

At the Pancras Road entrance a three man BA team with hosereel attempt to gain entry but severe heat means withdrawal. Three other crew with a hosereel have entered and manage to get to the subway and locate a body and, leaving the hosereel jet on spray, the team are able to remove the body to street level. The burned casualty's mouth could not be opened for resuscitation. The crew re-enter and discover Stn Officer Townsley's body, facing down with his head pointing towards the bottom of some stairs. In atrocious conditions the crew drag the body to the bottom of the stairs. With tremendous effort a fireman in the team of three is able to drag the body up the first flight of stairs to the landing with water protection from his two colleagues. A23's pump crew approach in BA and help remove the body of Stn Officer Townsley to street level.

At 2003 the ADO sends 'make pumps twelve'. Pumps West Hampstead, Islington and Kensington, plus Sothwark's PL, are mobilised. A further ADO, three DOs, ACO and DACO are sent on. A landline message is made from a phone box to Wembley Control informing them of missing firemen.

A25 Westminster's PL arrives. They rig in BA and assemble at the Control Point. A BA crew of three, from Soho pass them, enter the subway at Kings Cross, taking a charged hose. Advancing they come across two bodies which they do not move. A fireman returns to the control point advising the location of the bodies and wants the hose line extended. He returns to his colleagues who are having difficulty moving the hose as it is trapped on debris. As he approaches the hose team he hears a distress signal unit in front of him. The two colleagues he had just left are in distress. Another BA team are close by and the group are moved or dragged out and one, who is unconscious, is immediately taken to hospital.

Make pumps twenty is sent at 2019. Make pumps thirty at 2111. Fire surrounded at 2148. At 0146 the stop message was sent: The whole of a circular main concourse fifty metres in diameter serving four Underground lines and one British Rail link, via two pedestrian tunnels, from street level to concourse to platform level damaged by fire. Three jets, BA. All persons not accounted for. An addendum: unknown number of persons rescued from a causeway and platform levels, 23 persons injured, 34 persons apparently dead. (It was subsequently confirmed that 31 people died).

The funeral of Station Officer Townsley from Soho fire station took place on Friday 27 November 1987.



The plaque at Soho fire station commemorating the valiant actions of all firefighters involved in the King's Cross fire and Soho's Station Officer Townsley who lost his life whilst attempting a rescue at the fire.

Photo: Steve Dodge

This material has been considerably abridged from 'How London's firefighters answered the call', published by LFCDA at the end of 1988.